DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 847 FL 020 548

AUTHOR Varricchio, Andrea
TITLE Electronic Mail in a Spanish Language Business Course.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 92
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions (11th, Ypsilanti, MI, March 25-28, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; Business Correspondence; Class Activities; Communication Skills; *Computer Assisted Instruction; Course Descriptions; *Electronic Mail; Higher Education; *International Communication; Second Language Learning; Skill Development; *Spanish; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS West Chester University of Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A course in Commercial Spanish at West Chester University in Pennsylvania is described that incorporates computer networking and a writing emphasis. Students use word processing and electronic mail to facilitate writing assignments, with the E-Mail function managed through the university's computing center. The 20 students in the class included native speakers, graduating Spanish majors, and students with only three or four previous semesters of Spanish. E-Mail was useful for actual assignments, class information, news items, and several exemplary biweekly student comments which were presented as examples. Expository and persuasive writing were featured in the form of business letters. Students were also involved in group class work. The course provided students with many invaluable skills, including those related to business courses, computer use, and technical concepts. (LB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED347847

# Electronic Mail
# in
# A Spanish Language Business Course

Dr. Andrea Varricchio
Department of Foreign Languages
West Chester University

Eleventh Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference
on
Languages and Communication
for
World Business and the Professions

March 28, 1992

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Geoffrey Voight

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

FL 020 548



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

During the Spring semester of 1990, I was a participant in the Weiss-Fabrey Writing Project at West Chester University. This project was funded by a grant from the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education. It was designed to use computer-networking or LAN (Limited Access Computer Networking) in conjunction with writing emphasis courses that carried a writing emphasis credit. As part of the general education requirement, students must take three approved writing emphasis courses.

The course I taught was Commercial Spanish, the first writing emphasis course taught in a foreign language at West Chester University. In order to obtain a designation of writing emphasis for my course, it was necessary to explain the different types of writing assignments that would be used. In other words, a course merely stressing the mechanics of writing, (i.e. grammar, vocabulary and punctuation), even with numerous writing assignments, would not have received a writing emphasis designation. In the past, our department sought to have advanced composition courses designated as writing emphasis, but this was denied on the basis of the emphasis given in these courses to the mechanics of writing. The Writing Across the Curriculum Program sought courses that used writing assignments to help students better understand course concepts and to improve their learning.

The students used word processing and electronic mail or E-Mail to facilitate their writing assignments. Electronic

mail is a computer function whereby one user can send a message to another via the computer. This was possible through LAN connections from the dorms to the Computing Center and through a modem in my office which is hooked up to the telephone. The knowledge of word processing and E-Mail were also practical skills that the students would need in the business world. I might add that I was not an expert on word processing or E-mail, nor am I now, but I was able to use both without any great difficulty in my class.

The 20 students in my class included native speakers, graduating Spanish majors and students with only 3 and 4 previous semesters of Spanish. An intermediate level of Spanish was the only prerequisite for the course. On the whole, my students and I were quite pleased with the results of a Spanish writing emphasis course coupled with the benefits of computer assisted instruction (CAI).

Most found E-Mail to be efficient and helpful in reading messages as soon as received rather than filing hand-outs in a folder. All writing for the course was done in Spanish, and the only non-PC related writing activities were the chapter quizzes given in class.

I sent the students 13 messages via E-Mail during the course of the semester, 4 of which were actual assignments, the rest being class information, news items and several exemplary biweekly student comments. The later were sent to students as examples of what I considered to be good comments

and why.

Although the students sent me short assignments via E-mail, the assignments themselves were not dependent on the use of electronic mail. The assignments were examples of expository and factual report writing and less than 200 words in length. I corrected and commented on the assignments by copying the E-mail message on to my data disk with my office computer. Then at home on my own PC, I would high-light errors by using the bold function of my word processing package. We used PC- Write, because it was a program that could be copied and given to students. After completing my comments, I would then return the assignment to the student via E-mail.

During the first half of the semester, 3 factual-expository assignments included student comments on class activities and on material covered in class; these assignments were completed via E-mail every other week. During the second half of the semester, 2 E-mail assignments involved a comment on one article written in English and a summary of another. These articles pertained to information previously studied. Two additional assignments included a comment and summary, respectively, of two Spanish videos.

Another type of factual report writing involved group work and collaborative learning. The class was divided into 5 groups of 4, each group being responsible for a specific area of the Hispanic world. Every other week, each group

would report on a specific news item pertaining to their area and send the summary of the report to me and to another group. There were four assignments of this type. Each group member was to take turns in sending a report. I would correct and comment on the report and send the corrected version to all group members. This procedure was made easy by creating a group name that included all group members. This procedure permitted me to send only five messages, one per group, as opposed to 18 students.

In addition to E-mail assignments, students were also required to hand in assignments that were printed on a laser printer. This was necessary as the PC-Write program could not print Spanish characters on a regular printer.

At mid semester and at the end of the semester, each group gave an oral report along with individual written reports of 150-250 words. The purpose of these assignments was two fold: to train students to express sophisticated ideas with their less sophisticated Spanish vocabulary and to culturalize the business course so that the students would become more knowledgeable of Hispanic affairs.

At the beginning of the semester, students worked in groups during class to learn how to summarize articles, as opposed to translating them. I provided samples of my summaries in Spanish. When the groups were formed, a native speaker was placed in each to provide a role model. Most of the students in each group took advantage of the native

speaker's knowledge. Most found it difficult to meet outside of class and only some communicated via E-Mail. The students liked the concept of group work with a native speaker, but found it difficult to arrange meetings outside of class.

As examples of expository and persuasive writing, students wrote seven business letters printed on a laser printer. Before the students wrote a letter, we discussed a sample in class. The most interesting and original letters were: the circular letter in the from of an advertisement, a script for a commercial, a cover letter for a job interview, and a resume. The students also presented the commercial in class and a had a job interview with me. The later was part of their final exam.

As a pretest at the beginning of the semester, the students had three tasks: to identify office equipment in Spanish, to translate a paragraph from the Spanish text to English and to translate an article of their choosing (100 words) from English to Spanish. Needless to say, they did not possess a specialized vocabulary nor translating skills.

As part of their final exam, the students were given their original translations which they had not seen since the beginning of the semester. They were asked to make corrections only, using the word processing function of boldface to high-light their errors and to comment on the quality of their own translations, in the same fashion that I had commented on their work throughout the semester. I

wanted to test their ability to spot their own errors and make suggestions for improvement. Some did quite well, while others failed to recognize problems. This exercise was not designed to test content acquired, but rather the student's ability to translate ideas. In many business situations abroad, the American business person must be able to discuss ideas which are familiar in English, but complicated to express in the second language. Throughout the semester, this skill was practiced via scenarios acted out in class and the group summaries of news items.

The evaluator for the Weiss-Fabrey Writing Project, was in charge of tabulating the results of pre and post tests. In the case of my course, the pretest mean was 58 and the post test mean was 81. The ANOVA (One Way Analysis of Variants, from Minitab) comparison of the means of 58 and 81 resulted in an F ratio of 17.06, df (degree of freedom) 1/36, $p < .001$. This is statistically significant, as the probability of these results occurring is less than 1 in 1000.

I feel that the course provided my students with many invaluable skills in relation to their knew knowledge of business. This was the first contact that many had with any type of business course and with a computer. The post-test mean indicates that they indeed were successful in learning technical concepts in a foreign language through many varied writing assignments completed with the aid of a PC and E-mail mail.